

to your favorite allegation, she is a sovereign. You are constantly assured by your political teachers that the proudest of all titles is that of American citizen, and that the American citizen, as one of the sovereign people, partakes of sovereignty. Now royal houses may intermarry, and how can an American sovereign be a proper match for any title-bearer but a scion of sovereignty?

But more than this, he added, the wearer of the title of American sovereign, in marrying for a title, must condescend to nothing less than a prince, because a just regard for American dignity would spurn a *mésalliance*. In a country where, in virtue of being a republic, every citizen is a sovereign, the philosopher insisted that all foreign marriages except with royalty must be regarded as inadmissible. If this were not conceded, he argued, it is evident to what social anarchy the mis-married American sovereign would be exposed. The American sovereign wedding a knight, or any husband of inferior degree, would be obliged to submit to the precedence of a sister sovereign who had married into a superior rank. Would that be tolerable? Would she expose American dignity to such an affront? What boots it, cried the philosopher, to espouse an earl if Cousin Emma has won a marquis? The only prize gained would be the constant and offensive consciousness that there was a higher prize which Cousin Emma had seized.

The only conclusion I can reach, said the philosopher, is that in the impossible case supposed—namely, that an American

sovereign of the gentler sex should fancy a foreign alliance—the only choice open to her is royalty; but as, in view of the number of American sovereigns, royalty, as you say in this country, would not “go round,” the only course really open is not to marry a title at all. The gentleman with the queue smiled. Then, he said, this reasoning seems to be conclusive in the purely imaginary case of the American queen who should aim to marry a title.

But I have not mentioned the other case, he said, of the American maiden sovereign who does not marry a title, but the man who happens to bear the title, and that we all know—and he bowed politely—would be the case of any American maiden. She then marries despite the title; the title cannot be helped. It is like the color of the eyes or the hair; like the figure and the movement. They are integral parts of the beloved object. Having him, no other can take precedence of her. Whether he be prince, duke, marquis, viscount, or earl, or even baron, it is all one. She marries, as in a republic they all marry, sweetly smiled the Chinese philosopher, for love. American simplicity is charming. I dined yesterday at the Croesus, and I do not think a banquet of Heliogabalus would have surpassed its Apician frugality. I have been in all countries, but if the feasts of the finest courts in the world surpass the splendor of your republican simplicity, I have not discovered it, said the Chinese philosopher, as he politely wished the wondering Easy Chair good-morning.

Feb-1891

## Editor's Study.

### I.

IF Messrs. Nicolay and Hay needed any justification or defence for the proportions which the biography of Abraham Lincoln took in their hands, they could find it in the words of that other greatest American, who said, “He is the true history of the American people in his time.” But they do not need these words of Emerson to account for the growth of their work to the ten generous volumes which seem at last to have compassed it, and no more. The narrative is a continually expanding stream which

leaves its source at the dim beginning of our annals, and winds its way with broader and broader glimpses of all the bordering facts and conditions till it swells into the sea of national life, and becomes for a time the main which all tributary streams enter and are lost in. But if it had been from the opening to the closing passage simply and strictly the story of Abraham Lincoln, what he said and did, what he thought and was, we should not have censured it for its length, or found it too much. It is his life, his character, his personality, which



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gives a final charm to the masses and details of fact wherever they seem little, or loosely, or not at all, related to him, and the outcome if not the progress of the history is biographical. Its persons are made to live in the reader's thoughts; their experiences become part of him; it achieves by the simplest means the result which history mostly fails of, inasmuch that if we cannot say that we wish history might always be written like it, we are quite ready to say that we would on no account have had this history written otherwise. The authors were most familiarly, if not most intimately associated with the man from whose story their names cannot hereafter be dissociated; and it is as if they had instinctively told it as he would have wished it told. It is informal to the last degree, but never undignified; it is plain, but never common; and it is in style and in method as far as can be from all other histories of our time. We are not so conversant with Mr. Nicolay's manner as with Mr. Hay's, but we have seldom been able to assure ourselves that this or that episode was from one or other of the joint authors. Their sacrifice to their task has been complete; they have not merely not wished to distinguish themselves in it, but they have not tried to distinguish themselves from each other. Every part of the immense accumulation of material has been assimilated by the two writers, but the form of its reproduction is so impersonal that it seems as if the facts had made their own record, as if the Nation and the Man had here told their own story in their own way. It does not lessen, it heightens the illusion that the matter often utters itself in divers tones of never unkindly irony: that is the surface mood of America. it was the surface mood of Lincoln, and it does not discord with the deeply underlying earnest in the theme. But nothing of the effect which is so satisfyingly appropriate can be accidental; it must be the result of long-studied and well-counselled intention; and we can be glad of the greatest biography of Lincoln not only as the most important work yet accomplished in American history, but as one of the noblest achievements of literary art: the art which is never noble, but always trivial and base when it is sundered from the service of truth and humanity.

## II.

Looking back over the whole course of the narrative, the most interesting thing to note is how gradually yet inevitably Lincoln grew to a national proportion, until at his death he stood so completely for his country that without him it may be said that his country would have had no adequate expression. If America means anything at all, it means the sufficiency of the common, the insufficiency of the uncommon. It is the affirmation in political terms of the Christian ideal, which when we shall affirm it in economical and social terms will make us the perfect state; and Lincoln was the earliest, if he is not yet the only American, to realize in his office the divine purport of the mandate, "Is any first among you? Let him be your servant." He had a just ambition, and a just pride in duty well done, and a just hope of gratitude and recognition; but all these motives sank into abeyance, and may be said not to have governed his action, which was ruled simply by the desire to serve to his best ability the people who had set him over them. If it were not for the record, this long tale of what he bore and did, his patience with every manner of wilfulness and weakness, vanity and arrogance, wickedness and stupidity, would be incredible. His one desire to get the best out of himself, seems to have taught him how to get the best out of others, and he cast no man aside while there was even the hope of any good in him. There is no more signal example of this fact than his treatment of McClellan; and we might almost say that in no other passages of his history is the character of Lincoln made so fully known as in those which give the tragedy of that immeasurable disappointment. A color of his magnanimous patience characterizes the judgment of his historians; they do justice to McClellan's good qualities and his finally unimpeachable patriotism; and they recognize that what Lincoln was hopelessly contending with in the man was not a vice or a crime, but an incurable temperament.

Very possibly the situation has been portrayed before, but we have not been given so perfect a sense, before, of the attitude which Lincoln kept throughout the war, between his people and his generals, until Grant came to his relief. In the mirror which is now held up to that



great, unhappy time we see Lincoln, diffident of his own skill in war craft, urging the military leaders on in the way which was the right way, and continually thwarted by their delay, their error, or their disobedience, while keeping back their civil censors, and bearing with superhuman patience their blame for not satisfying the longing for action that was rending his own heart. It is a wonderful spectacle in the plain daylight now thrown upon it, but not more wonderful than the less dramatic spectacle of Lincoln's position in his own political household, with the rivalries of Seward and Chase in latent or overt contention about him. When both of these really great statesmen and really unselfish patriots one day resigned, and Lincoln prevailed on them both to come back into the cabinet, he found relief in the humorous sarcasm, "I can ride easy now; I've got a pumpkin in each end of the bag."

### III.

The humor of Lincoln was, like that of most great humorists, the break of an intense and profound seriousness. Its sunny flash caught the eye more than the solemn depths from which it rose, and his biographers make something like a protest against the exaggerated popular estimate of it. This is very well, but it will not avail. There is a sort of tricky caprice, a whim like a woman's, which fixes the popular estimate of all things, and which no reasoning can change. It is this, apparently, which has chosen the Gettysburg Address to pre-eminent fame out of all the beautiful and perfect things that Lincoln has written and said. Something in the supreme occasion, in the matchless worth of the main thoughts, and in the very quality of haste evident in it, consecrates it to the first place in the memory of the people, and it would be both perilous and futile to attempt to replace it with any other words even of the same man. What surprises, what astonishes, one in a critical examination of his words at all times, almost from the first use he makes of written words, is his artistic sense of them. Here, indeed, is something like the operation of genius, of the thing that we are so many of us eager to substitute for consciousness. It is as if Lincoln were so deeply concerned with what he was thinking that he did not know how electly he was saying it. But

we believe it would be a mistake to suppose this; we believe that this man, without any scholarly training, had schooled himself, had trained himself, to the study of expression, till he felt through all his consciousness the beauty of simplicity, that last and farthest grace, and till it became his second nature to use the right word in the right place, so that he could not have erred without the pain the artist knows when any vocable rings false.

Literary men are somewhat beclouded by the traditions of the shop, in their view of literature. They think it is somehow peculiarly the affair, the product of literary men; and it is good and very wholesome for them to realize that it is by no means entirely so, or perhaps more than partly so. It is not literary men who give it even its most delicate or penetrating subtlety; and there are many other sorts of men who endue it with nobleness and strength. We were thinking as we read many passages quoted in this life of Lincoln from jurists and statesmen, and mere politicians, what a high level of literature was struck by these other sorts of men whenever they had something important to say; and more than ever we rebelled against the notion that good literature is solely the effect of literary culture. In fact his learning may sometimes cumber a man, and make him clumsy and diffuse, and it is always tempting him to mistake the outward shape for the vital inward structure, and to prize what has been put on more than what has come out. Perhaps the fact that the culture, the learning of other men is in unliterary directions is what gives them the advantage of literary men when it comes to literary expression; though this seems pushing conjecture into paradox. What is certain is that the literature of those other men, as we find it quoted in these volumes, is something that gives the reader the pleasure which any fine art imparts. Even the terms in which the Dred Scott decision was rendered are very noble and simple. That decision is not better literature than the dissenting opinions, but it is remarkable for being no worse; it has a kind of state that charms as much as its misreading of history shocks; and it is not without a touch of pathos for "the unfortunate race" whose cruel destiny it finds implicated in its cruel past. But for the most part the pro-slavery men wrote worse

and spoke worse, in the artistic sense, than the antislavery men; perhaps the habit of declaring wrong right, in defiance of reason, resulted in an intellectual decay which inevitably expressed itself in bombast and swagger. At any rate that seems to have become for a time the type of the literature of the South, where since the hard necessity of affirming the heavenly origin of slavery has passed, the work in literature has been so wholesome and important.

Of course it will not do to carry too far the theory of a strict relation between ethics and aesthetics, and to deny that a thing artistically good can come out of a thing morally bad. It might be proved; it seems very probable; but it is not indispensable to an appreciation of the excellence of Lincoln's way of saying things. Any study of any writer will establish the proposition that right-mindedness is the condition of clear-mindedness, that no man can hope to muddle others without first muddling himself; and it never was the wish of Lincoln to do either. Reason charmed him. It is beautiful to see how from the first he sought only to have a lucid vision of the thing before him; how he never failed to accept, to exalt any truth that he clearly discerned. But he had to find out the truth for himself; he reasoned to it; he could not take it ready-reasoned from another, no matter how great, how wise. It was this trait that made him one of the most consistent statesmen who ever lived, and kept him honest from the log cabin to the White House. It is this that gives a perfect solidarity to his whole history, and makes it not less important in its study of his obscure beginnings than in its reflection of his life when it encompassed the nation's. He had faults and foibles which are not blinked by his biographers; he was not far ahead of his time at any time, and he was always of his place, in the Mississippi flat-boat and in the ship of state. But his face was always and everywhere toward the light. This is perhaps the sum of what his biographers make you feel concerning him, and you might justly say that you knew this already.

#### IV.

The fact that almost everything about Lincoln was known already must have added immensely to the difficulties of their task. No man ever lived whose character, whose history, whose heart

has been more thoroughly explored. The inmost recesses of his most intimate experiences have been laid bare to the curiosity as well as to the sympathy of the world, and his public acts have been subjected to a scrutiny whose intensity has left no motive unsearched. The make of the man in every regard has been portrayed till his image and superscription are ineffaceably stamped upon the thoughts of the generation that knew him in life; and whatever mystery may hereafter gather about him in the ages of an undying fame, the strong, deep lines will always show clear to the eye that scans them. The work of his biographers, then, has been largely a synthesis of impressions, and a dignified and temperate criticism of portraitures which distort or misrepresent him in this point or that, but are none of them wholly unlike. In fact Lincoln was so like all other men, was so essentially human, that if any honest man conceives clearly of himself he cannot altogether misconceive Lincoln. He was so simple, so modest, so good, that he seems a riddle to the sophisticated, and perhaps until the world wholly changes its ideals of distinction and majesty this plainest great man who ever lived must remain a mystery with those who require distance in their great men. He was every one's neighbor, the friendliest, the faithfulest; and he solved in his life the question of how one may continue a hero to one's valet simply by not having any valet, or even thinking of any human being in that relation to him.

#### V.

It is because we feel that he could only have gained from it that we wish these biographers who knew him so near at hand, had somewhere synthetized their personal impressions of him, and confided to us the last possible word that could be said of his private life. It is true that scattered throughout their biography there are glimpses of what we desire to be fully shown, but without some massing of these details there is a sense of incompleteness. Perhaps we shall finally have added to this monumental work the studies of Lincoln's daily life in the White House which one of the authors is now publishing; if so, there would be nothing left to desire in the materials they supply for a judgment of the man.

As to the general structure of the his-



tory, it seems to us admirably fitted to the materials. There were certain interests that must be treated throughout the whole narrative, and there were certain others that could be regarded as episodes, and set aside after the course of the story had been stayed long enough to do them justice. The French invasion of Mexico was distinctly one of these; and the Vallandigham farce another; and such characters as those of John Brown and Stonewall Jackson could be considered in a single chapter, and thereafter let alone. It is true that Brown had a historical importance which Jackson never had; Brown was of the course of events, but he was a reversionary type like Jackson, who was historically a mere anecdote, curious but not important. What makes him chiefly interesting is that psychologically he was so much of John Brown's make. Our authors study his character in the biographies written by his friends, and their account of Andersonville is wisely drawn entirely from Confederate sources. In fact, considering the many matters of impassioned opinion involved by their subject, the relation of our authors to men and events is remarkably judicial. There is never any question of what their own mind is, but they have a resolute fairness toward those who are of another mind. An eminent example of this is to be found in their scrutiny of the career and character of Stephen A. Douglas, the early rival of Lincoln—an able, selfish, unscrupulous, but not finally dishonest or unpatriotic partisan. Another example of it is in their treatment of the peace party at the North.

But we wish especially to persuade intending readers of the work from slighting the chapters and volumes relating to the origin and development of Lincoln, in the belief that they are comparatively unimportant. They are comparatively most important. They establish the perspective through which only he can be seen aright on the great scene of national history. That part of the work is done with perhaps even greater solidity and dignity than the later passages, which are suffused with a greater warmth of feeling. It is of course merely truistic to say that we cannot understand the man Lincoln became without knowing the man he was; but we are willing to say this in urging every part of his history upon the reader. We wish that it could be known

to every citizen of the republic, and especially to its Southern citizens, the young men coming forward to rule the heritage which in the nature of things they must be only too apt to idealize their mistaken fathers for having tried to throw away. It is the history of this great error couched in terms which ought not to offend, and which can greatly instruct them.

## VI.

People who like a strong novel, with intense yet real feeling in it, and the suggestion of earnest thinking, cannot do better than turn to the one which we read between chapters of the Lincoln history, not to shorten it, but to eke it out in length of time. This novel was the last of Björnstjerne Björnson's, which he calls *In God's Ways*, and which has to do with the several walks of a physician and of a minister in them. Norway is a little country and America is a big one, but the spiritual conditions are much the same; the type of pharisaism is the protestant type in both, and the questions involved fit either civilization. They are questions of conscience, and they are dealt with in the lives of people who when they answer them mistakenly do not answer them wickedly, and who when they answer them rightly are not supposed to acquire merit with their Maker for doing so: they remain all very fallible people the same, just as all but a very few of us should if we were in their places. The conclusion of the whole matter is expressed in the words of Pastor Tuft, after his reconciliation with Dr. Kallem, whom he and his wife (Kallem's sister) have so cruelly misunderstood, "There where good people walk, those are God's ways."

The words are spoken in response to the declaration Kallem feels bound to make, "But I do not share your faith," and they surrender the claim to judge another for his opinions and to punish him for them, which we all like to urge. Kallem's opinions are of various heterodox sorts: they permit him to marry a woman divorced from her first husband, and to revere her memory as that of a saint after his sister's not unnatural unkindness has followed her to her death with eager acceptance of all the neighborhood lies against her. Tuft's orthodoxy cannot yield to the necessity for a merely mechanical falsehood with a patient of Kallem's, who must be kept in

ignorance of an amputation performed upon him, and whose death the pastor becomes accessory to in owning the truth about his case. We must leave the reader to follow the story through the evolution of its entirely human characters, and the passages of a drama which has moments of breathless interest; but we can assure him he will not be trifled with or defrauded by any trick of the trade in any part of the action. We ask him to note how probably, and yet how unexpectedly, the different men and women grow out of the children whose life is first presented to us. That is a very great thing, and very uncommon; it is only Tolstoï, that other giant of the North, who has known how to do it as well; and certainly even Tolstoï has not known better how to indicate the compensation of error and virtue in the same person. Any one who loves truth must feel a thrill of delight in the variety of the conceptions in this book, and of more than delight, of fervent gratitude. Such things console mightily; they give hope of a final perfection in art through the artist's simple devotion to truth. If any reader of these pages is at present skulking about with the guilty consciousness of having read Maupassant's *Notre Cœur*, we suggest to him that he can make that loathsome experi-

ence useful by comparing the Norwegian novel with the French novel, and observing how the Frenchman grovels into mere romanticism, and is false even to the fashionable filth he studies, while Björnson never fails of reality in the high level his imagination keeps.

It is interesting, at the moment Maupassant offers us his picture of high life in Paris, and fails to persuade us that it is a portrait of life anywhere, to find the Spanish novelist Valdés painting the aristocracy of Madrid with such vigorous strokes as vivify the scenes of his *Espuma*. The book, which we hope to take up again, is translated in English under the name of *Scum*, and this version of the word, which is a bit violent, is not inapt. It recognizes, once for all, that it is the top of aristocratic and plutocratic "society" in all countries which is really the scum, and not those poor plebeian dregs which mostly boil about the bottom of the caldron and never get to the surface at all. What Valdés's feeling about the "best" people of his country is, the reader of his former novels pretty well knows; but here it is stated in terms co-extensive with his book; and the book is important because it is a part of that expression of contemporary thought about contemporary things now informing fiction in all countries but England.

## Monthly Record of Current Events.

### POLITICAL.

OUR Record is closed on the 15th of December. —At the elections held November 4th, Governors were chosen in nineteen States as follows: California, H. H. Markham, Republican; Colorado, John L. Routt, Republican; Connecticut, Luzon B. Morris, Democrat; Delaware, Robert J. Reynolds, Democrat; Idaho, George L. Shoup, Republican; Kansas, L. U. Humphrey, Republican; Massachusetts, William E. Russell, Democrat; Michigan, Edwin B. Winans, Democrat; Minnesota, W. R. Merriam, Republican; Nebraska, James E. Boyd, Democrat; Nevada, R. K. Colcord, Republican; North Dakota, Andrew H. Burke, Republican; Pennsylvania, Robert E. Pattison, Democrat; South Carolina, B. R. Tillman, Farmers' Alliance and "regular" Democrat; South Dakota, Arthur C. Mellette, Republican; Tennessee, J. P. Buchanan, Democrat; Texas, James S. Hogg, Democrat; Wisconsin, G. W. Peck, Democrat; Wyoming, Francis E. Warren, Republican. In New Hampshire no candidate having received the majority of all the votes cast, the choice of Governor will be made by the Legislature.

The elections for members of the House of Representatives for the Fifty-second Congress resulted in the choice of 222 Democrats, 92 Republicans, and 17 Farmers' Alliance men.

In New York city, Hugh J. Grant, Tammany Democrat, was re-elected Mayor by a majority of 23,199.

The second session of the Fifty-first Congress convened December 1st.—The President in his Message referred in congratulatory terms to the peaceful relations existing between the United States and all foreign nations, to the satisfactory condition of the national finances, and to the marked improvement in foreign and domestic commerce. He called attention to the agitation and organization among the agricultural classes, mentioned briefly the satisfactory work of the Civil Service Commission, discussed the effects of recent legislation, and, among other recommendations, urged the passage of the Lodge Election Bill.—The report of the Secretary of the Treasury shows that the revenues of the government for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1890, were \$463,963,080 55, and the expenditures \$358,618,584 52. The estimated surplus for the present year is \$52,000,000. The increase of money in circulation since March 4, 1889, has been \$93,866,813.—The report of the Postmaster-General shows that the increase in the receipts of the Post-office Department during the past year has been over \$4,750,000.—The report of the Secretary of the Interior shows that during the present ad-

